

**Southwest Area Mobilization Guide**  
**Chapter 20 - Administrative Procedures**  
**Section 26 • Preparedness Levels**

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## **26.1 Overview of the Southwest Area Preparedness Level Plan**

**a. Purpose.** All wildland protection agencies are directed to protect life, property, and the natural and cultural resources they manage. This requires careful attention to the availability and use of firefighting resources. A system has been established to determine the preparedness levels that will be utilized by all fire management agencies within the Southwest. These preparedness levels will provide for presuppression and suppression capabilities suited to fire hazard, risk, and the overall situation complexity.

This plan will serve three primary functions:

1. To coordinate workforce and equipment needs for wildfire suppression and fire use activities.
2. To insure that fire protection and fire use responsibilities are coordinated with area and national suppression needs.
3. To coordinate fire management resource utilization under the National Response Plan.

Preparedness levels are basically dictated by:

- Condition of the fuels and their resultant burning characteristics.
- Existing and forecast significant fire potential.
- Fire activity, prescribed and wildland, both within and outside the Southwest Area.
- Resource availability, within and outside the Southwest Area.

### **b. Definitions**

**Fire Use.** Wildland fire use or prescribed fire applications utilized to meet fuel hazard reduction and resource objectives.

**Prescribed Fire.** Any fire ignited by management actions to meet specific objectives. A written, approved prescribed fire burn plan must exist, and NEPA requirements must be met prior to ignition.

**Predictive Services Areas (PSAs).** Regions of roughly similar fuels, weather and topography where a statistical correlation has been established between historical fire occurrence and selected NFDRS stations. There are 16 PSAs in the Southwest.

**Significant Fire Potential.** The likelihood a fire situation will require mobilization of additional resources from outside the area in which the fire situation originates. This can be applied to PSAs Dispatch Zones and/or Geographic Area.

**SWA 3-Day Average Severity Curve.** The Energy Release Component (ERC), derived from representative NFDRS stations throughout the area, is averaged over each 3-day period to obtain an area-wide, 3-day average severity curve.

**Wildland Fire.** Any non-structure fire, other than prescribed fire, that occurs in the wildland. This term encompasses all wildland fires, which are all managed using the appropriate management response (AMR).

**Wildland Fire Use.** The management of naturally ignited wildland fires to accomplish specific predated resource management objectives in predefined areas outlined in fire management plans. Wildland fire use is not to be confused with "Fire Use."

**7-Day Significant Fire Potential Outlook.** A 7-day outlook of significant fire potential for each of the Southwest Area PSAs which integrates fuels and weather information into classifications related directly to the potential for significant fire activity. The table below relates historical fire occurrence and probabilities for significant fire activity to the outlook classifications.

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<b>Fire Potential Color Classification</b>	<b>Significant Fire Risk Description</b>	<b>Historical Significant Fires in Color Class</b>	<b>Chance of Significant Fire (Given 100 or More Ignitions)</b>
Green (Moist)	Little or none	9%	≤ 3%
Yellow (Dry)	Low	30%	7%
Brown (Very Dry)	Moderate	60%	13%
Red (High Risk)	High	1%	20% (estimated)

c. **Fire Preparedness Level Determination Procedures.** The Southwest Coordination Center Manager will establish the overall preparedness level for the Southwest Area, but consult with the SWCG during PLs III-V. The following criteria will help determine preparedness levels.

1. Current and forecasted environmental conditions affecting:
  - a. Current and forecasted significant fire potential.
  - b. Current and trend of Southwest Area 3-Day Average Severity Curve.
  - c. Comparison of Southwest Area 3-Day Average Severity Curve to climatology and historical fire activity.
2. Individual agency reports of fire activity.
3. National Preparedness Level.
4. Fire suppression resource availability. Resource commitments to activities (i.e., projects, prescribed fire, wildfire, NRP).

d. **National Preparedness Levels** may suggest that Southwest Area preparedness levels be raised due to a large number of resources being out of the area and unavailable for Southwest response. During periods of high Southwest fire danger/activity, the Southwest Area preparedness level may be higher than the National preparedness level.

e. **Using the Plan.** Each preparedness level requires specific actions, assigned to certain Southwest Area positions or organizations. When a planning level has been established, the responsible individuals are to carry out their assignments without further notification. Each SWCG member will be responsible for coordinating the activities triggered by the preparedness level, upon the lands and staffing within their agency's jurisdiction. The Southwest Area Predictive Services Unit will monitor Southwest factors daily. When Preparedness Levels I and II are exceeded, the Predictive Services Unit Leader will notify the SWCC Center Manager, who will evaluate the situation and recommend the appropriate actions.

## **26.2 Preparedness Level Action Plan**

### **26.2.1 PREPAREDNESS LEVEL I**

All of the following occur for the SWA to be at PL-I:

- a. Fire danger in the area is low or moderate, with no more than two zones being high.
- b. SWA 3-Day Average Severity Curve is below 40.
- c. Fire activity within the Southwest Area is light, and large fires are of short duration. There is little or no commitment of Southwest Area and/or national resources. No significant support to the National Response Plan.

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d. Southwest 7-Day Significant Fire Potential Outlooks indicate a maximum of four PSAs at consistently moderate (brown) or high (red) risk for significant fire activity.

**Special Prescribed Fire Direction.** The contingency plan is the portion of the prescribed fire plan that considers possible but unlikely events, and the contingency resources and actions needed to mitigate those events. The contingency plan will establish management action points or limits that indicate when additional holding resources and actions are needed. The Rx Burn Boss will verify and document the availability of identified contingency resources and response time on the day of implementation. If contingency resources availability falls below plan levels, actions must be taken to secure operations until identified contingency resources are replaced. Once a contingency resource is committed to a specific wildland fire action (wildfire, wildland fire use, or prescribed fire), it can no longer be considered a contingency resource and a suitable replacement contingency resource must be identified or the ignition halted. The dispatch center should be included in the list of planned contingency resources.

Responsibility – PL-I	Action Items
<b>Southwest Coordinating Group</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Select staff for Incident Management Teams.</li><li>2. As needed, review and update the State Joint Powers Agreements.</li><li>3. Review SWCC Operations Guide and delegate authority to the SWCC Center Manager to carry it out.</li><li>4. Review and revise the SWCG handbook.</li></ol>
<b>SWCC Center Manager</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Review and update the “SWCC Operations Guide” and provide update to the SWCG for comments. Lead and coordinate the annual revision of the “Southwest Area Mob Guide.”</li><li>2. Pre-position National fire radio cache systems at Silver City and Prescott.</li><li>3. As needed, assist the SWCG in the revision of operating plans under state Joint Powers Agreements.</li><li>4. Review and make recommendations on operating plans for mobilization centers in the Southwest Area.</li><li>5. Review, revise and develop a memorandum of understanding between the Southwest Area and other Geographic Areas as needed.</li><li>6. Followup with dispatch centers to assure preseason agreements are completed; provide assistance where needed.</li><li>7. Assure flight following practices are followed.</li><li>8. Monitor weekly situation reports.</li><li>9. Notify NICC, Southwest Area Dispatch Centers, and the SWCG of any major incidents.</li></ol>

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10. Participate in zone fire preparedness staff inspections throughout the Southwest Area.

11. Monitor resource availability.

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***Zone Coordinating Group***

1. Organize Type 3 management organizations, if any. Encourage interagency IMT involvement by zone firefighters.
2. As needed, review operating plans under the State Joint Powers Agreements.
3. Review and revise zone operating plan; delegate authority to the zone center manager to carry it out.

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***Dispatch Center Manager***

1. Review “Zone Coordination Center Operating Plan” with the Zone Interagency Coordinating Group and make recommendations as necessary.
2. As needed, review and revise operating guides for local mobilization centers.
3. As needed, develop zone Interagency Hotshot Crew and Southwestern Forest Fire Fighter Crew rotation schedules.
4. Develop and maintain seasonal fire severity charts.
5. Assure preseason agreements are completed, provide assistance where needed.
6. Inform SWCC daily of any occurring or planned prescribed fires, and resource commitments to these treatments.
7. Notify SWCC and other Southwest Area dispatch centers of major incidents.
8. Assure flight following practices are adhered to.
9. Prioritize fire suppression actions to optimize suppression effectiveness within the zone and encourage units to utilize appropriate management response (AMR) strategies.
10. Update weekly situation reports on Thursdays.

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**26.2.2 PREPAREDNESS LEVEL II**

For the SW to be at PL-II, three of the following must be met:

- a. Several zones have a majority of units in high or higher fire danger.
- b. SWA 3-Day Average Severity Curve between 40 and 75.
- c. Numerous Class A, B, and C fires are occurring and a potential exists for larger fires of more than one burning period duration.
- d. Resources within the dispatch centers are adequate. Potential exists for frequent mobilization of additional resources from other dispatch centers. Some minor support to the National Response Plan may be occurring. Active pre-positioning of critical resources (such as T1 crews, airtankers) is occurring.
- e. Several Type 3 incidents per week are occurring, and there is an increasing fire danger trend over the next 2 weeks.
- f. Southwest 7-Day Significant Fire Potential Outlooks indicate 5 to 7 PSAs at consistently moderate (brown) or high (red) risk for significant fire activity.

**Special Prescribed Fire Direction.** The contingency plan is the portion of the prescribed fire plan that considers possible but unlikely events, and the contingency resources and actions needed to mitigate those events. The contingency plan will establish management action points or limits that indicate when additional holding resources and actions are needed. The Rx Burn Boss will verify and document the availability of identified contingency resources and response time on the day of implementation. If contingency resources availability falls below plan levels, actions must be taken to secure operations until identified contingency resources are replaced. Once a contingency resource is committed to a specific wildland fire action (wildfire, wildland fire use, or prescribed fire), it can no longer be considered a contingency resource and a suitable replacement contingency resource must be identified or the ignition halted. The dispatch center should be included in the list of planned contingency resources.

<b>Responsibility – PL-II</b>	<b>Action Items in Addition to Level I</b>
<b><i>Southwest Coordinating Group</i></b>	1. Ensure Type 1 Incident Management Team Southwest on-call schedule is active.
	2. Coordinate the issuance of press releases that highlight interagency current conditions and a brief outlook.
	3. Consider “normality” of fire season and if early/late activation of Type 2 and FUMTs is warranted.
<b><i>SWCC Center Manager</i></b>	1. As needed, activate 7-day operations for SWCC.
	2. Expand SWCC operations to provide proper staffing of the Resource and Intelligence desks for 13- to 16-hour coverage, as needed.
	3. Initiate submission of daily area situation report.

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4. Compile and distribute resource availability within the Southwest Area, daily or weekly, as necessary.
  5. Contact National Weather Service offices to activate twice daily Fire Weather Forecasts.
  6. As needed, initiate and maintain Area-wide Severity Chart, SIT300 (IMT & crews), and SIT300A (aviation), Morning Intelligence Report, News & Notes, ROSS reports, and Unable to Fill List.
  7. Utilize SWCC staff to perform and distribute preseason risk assessments during periods of escalating risk going into the fire season.
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***Zone Coordinating Group***

1. Consider activating intelligence specialist(s) for zone.
  2. Coordinate the issuance of press releases that highlight current interagency conditions and a brief outlook.
  3. Ensure interagency coordination of fire use incidents is occurring.
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***Dispatch Center Manager***

1. Activate 7-day operation of the dispatch center as requested by the center manager. Expand dispatch center operations to provide for proper staffing as needed.
  2. Assure management systems provide sufficient support to keep computers and telecommunications fully operational.
  3. Compile and submit daily zone situation report.
  4. Initiate conference calls if needed to members of the Zone Coordinating Group to discuss the situation. Frequency of the conference calls and/or meetings to be determined by the Zone Coordinating Group.
  5. Monitor area-wide severity index with increased attention to an upward trend. Encourage interagency coordination of severity requests. Remind units to post approved requests on SWCC Web site.
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**26.2.3 PREPAREDNESS LEVEL III**

For the SW to be at PL-III, three of the following must be met:

- a. Four or more zones are experiencing high or greater fire danger in at least one state.
- b. SWA 3-Day Average Severity Curve between 75 and 85.
- c. High potential exists for fires becoming 100 acres or larger in brush or timber fuel types.
- d. There is potential for two or more units to experience incidents requiring a major commitment of area/national resources. Numerous additional resources are being ordered through SWCC; competition for resources exists between dispatch centers. Support of area resources to the National Response Plan may be moderate.
- e. Southwest 7-Day Significant Fire Potential Outlooks indicate 7 to 11 PSAs at consistently moderate (brown) or high (red) risk for significant fire activity.

**Special Prescribed Fire Direction.** Units considering prescribed fire activities must be prepared for the event that contingency resources may not be available when requested due to fire activity within the area. Constant communications and coordination must be maintained with the zone dispatch center.

<b>Responsibility – PL-III</b>	<b>Action Items in Addition to Levels I &amp; II:</b>
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***Southwest Coordinating Group***

1. Consider establishing interagency fire information specialist(s) for SWCC.
2. Initiate requests for state or regional level severity funds.
3. Consider activation of MAC Group. Consider designation of ready reserve firefighting resources if situations are escalating.
4. Consider funding and use of cooperative fire prevention/education team(s) (NIMG 22.5.10).
5. Work with agencies to stage or place critical resources in high risk areas.
6. Individual members monitor agency incidents to ensure proper utilization of the appropriate management response (AMR).

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***SWCC Center Manager***

1. Operate SW Area Coordination Center on a 24-hour basis, as needed.
2. Prioritize fire suppression actions to optimize suppression effectiveness by using appropriate logistical strategies.
3. In Preparedness Level III, when the preparedness window is exceeded, the SWCC Center Manager will notify the SWCG Chairperson of the situation. Each member of the Southwest Coordinating Group will personally be advised of the pending situation.
4. Assure management systems provide sufficient support to keep computers and telecommunications fully operational.

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5. Monitor the implementation of fire restrictions and closures throughout the Southwest Area.
6. Initiate conference calls to members of the SWCG to discuss current situations. Frequency of the conference calls and/or meetings to be determined by the group.
7. Maintain one-half of contact helicopters within the Southwest Area for initial attack.
8. Attempt to locate four heavy air tankers to be available in the Southwest Area for initial attack.
9. Maintain at least two hotshot crews per state for new start support.
10. Activate a Fire Behavior Center in SWCC as needed, based upon need and severity.
11. Coordinate conference calls with all zone center managers.
12. Maintain daily communication/coordination calls with T1, T2 and Fire Use Team ICs on active incidents.
13. Contact dispatch centers and determine seasonal availability dates of SWFF and T2 crews.
14. Monitor the availability status of Southwest Type 1 crews and aviation resources.

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***Zone Coordinating Group***

1. Encourage and coordinate interagency requests for severity funds as parameters allow.
2. Initiate, as needed, fire restrictions and closures, and associated interagency coordination procedures.
3. Maintain close coordination of all fire use activities, including resource needs.

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***Dispatch Center Manager***

1. As needed, operate zone dispatch center on a 24-hour basis.
  2. Through Zone Coordinating Group, monitor the implementation of fire restrictions and closures.
  3. Prepare daily morning management briefing paper.
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**26.2.4 PREPAREDNESS LEVEL IV**

For the SW to be at PL-IV, two of the following must be met:

- a. Numerous or the majority of zones are experiencing very high or extreme fire danger.
- b. SWA 3-Day Average Severity Curve at 85 or higher in at least one state.
- c. Fires of 100 acres or larger are common.
- d. There is significant competition for area resources, and national resources located in the Southwest Area. The potential exists to utilize all available area and national resources located in the Southwest Area, and to significantly impact national resources in other geographic areas. Support to the National Response Plan may be causing competition for firefighting resources.
- e. Southwest 7-Day Significant Fire Potential Outlooks indicate 12 or more PSAs at consistently moderate (brown) or high (red) risk for significant fire activity.

<b>Responsibility – PL-IV</b>	<b>Actions Items in Addition to Levels I-III</b>
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<b><i>Southwest Coordinating Group</i></b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Prioritize fire suppression actions to optimize suppression effectiveness within the SW Area. Encourage units to effectively utilize the appropriate management response (AMR).</li><li>2. Wildland fire use and prescribed fire applications can be continued or be initiated if the proposed action is approved by an agency at the Regional or State office level. This approval must be based on an assessment of risk, impacts of the proposed actions on area resources and activities, and include feedback from the SW MAC. SW MAC members will provide information or perspectives to agencies wishing to proceed with or implement a wildland fire use or prescribed fire application. The final decision to implement resides with the implementing agency.</li><li>3. The Southwest Area MAC Group will manage the assignment of all Incident Management Teams within the Southwest. Consider the prepositioning of IMTs or other critical resources, especially in escalating risk situations. Designate ready reserve resources, if firefighting resource shortages are developing. Consider requiring incident release advance notification for firefighting resources, pending active reassignments.</li></ol>
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<b><i>SWCC Center Manager</i></b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Request SWCG activate the MAC when complex fire incidents or issues develop, or when resource prioritization/competition issues develop.</li><li>2. Notify NICC and all SWA dispatch centers when MAC Group is operational.</li><li>3. Pre-position additional initial attack resources in strategic locations.</li><li>4. Provide SWCG/MAC with current resource availability, assignments, and potential shortages.</li></ol>
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<b><i>Zone Coordinating Group</i></b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Coordinate with agency heads the SW MAC direction to carefully consider, and receive Regional or State Office approval, for any initiation or continuance of prescribed or wildland fire use fires.</li><li>2. Determine interagency need for additional area closures and restrictions.</li></ol>
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**26.2.5 PREPAREDNESS LEVEL V**

For the SW to be at PL-V, at least one of the following must be met:

- a. Several zones are experiencing major fires, and critical national resources are fully utilized. Additional firefighting resources and support may not be available, or their arrival is delayed for multiple operational periods.
- b. Multiple Incident Management Teams are committed to incidents within the Southwest Area. Support to the National Response Plan may be high.
- c. Burning conditions are severe enough that control efforts are often compromised due to advanced or extreme fire behavior, or extreme spotting conditions. These conditions are widespread in the geographic area.
- d. The military may be tasked for assistance.

<b>Responsibility – PL-V</b>	<b>Action Items in Addition to Levels I-IV</b>
<b><i>Southwest Coordinating Group</i></b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Add Military Liaison to MAC Group if military is activated.</li><li>2. Continue to pre-position Incident Management Teams, ready reserve or critical resources, as needed.</li><li>3. Take additional steps to assure that all Agency administrators are advised of all current and predicted activities.</li><li>4. Conduct close monitoring of Southwest Area resources to assure that they are getting appropriate rest and recovery time.</li><li>5. Wildland fire use and prescribed fire application can be continued or initiated if the proposed action is approved at the Regional or State office level. The incident agency representative will assess risk and impacts of the proposed actions and discuss with the SW MAC. This group will have an opportunity to provide information or perspectives to agencies wishing to proceed with or implement a WFU or prescribed fire application. The final decision to implement resides with the implementing agency.</li><li>6. Request agency management make all non-critical, fire-qualified staff available for wildland fire support.</li></ol>
<b><i>SWCC Center Manager</i></b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Identify and staff additional staging areas for IMTs and other resources, as needed.</li></ol>